

State Technical Committee Meeting Minutes
NRCS State Office Conference Room
July 19, 2007

Shannon Zezula welcomed everyone to the meeting. Jane Hardisty also welcomed all. She asked that everyone introduce themselves because there were new members in attendance.

USDA Farm Bill Proposal

Jane updated the committee on the 2007 Farm Bill proposal. She stated that it has started with mark-up of House Agriculture Committee Bill. There are no plans to go to subcommittees. Hopefully in September the Senate will move forward on the Bill.

NRCS Indiana Workload Assessment

Jane gave a presentation on how the programs of NRCS, ProTracts and Toolkit, allows us to see where the work is located and to retrieve information such as:

- How many contracts by program and by county.
- Where the workload is by practices, including engineering practices that utilize much of the tech teams time. NRCS knows the planned workload from 2007 to 2010 so far.
- When and where the practices are to be installed by Tech Team Areas.
- The ability to comprehend what practices the landowners/producers are interested in.
- Information can be broken down by Engineering, Agronomy, and other aspects.
- The ability to determine how many livestock applications have been received and funded.
- The ability to track unfunded programs in each area and by fiscal year.
- The ability to determine what the resource concerns are, including soil condition resource concerns, soil erosion resource concerns, plant conditions, etc.
- Data can also be broken down by cost per practice per contract.

This is just a sample of the data that can be compiled by using the above-mentioned programs, and what NRCS-IN uses to assess workload, make staffing decisions, etc.

FY 07 Farm Bill Programs Update

Jim Dunaway, Acting for Harold Thompson-ASTC-Programs, updated the committee on funding allocations NRCS has received. WHIP- approximately \$416,000 received and 32 programs have been funded. There are 97 applications in backlog for approximately \$1,000,000. EQIP- approximately \$11,000,000 received and 650 contracts have been funded. There are 163 applications unfunded for approximately \$3,000,000. CSP-There is no signup for 2007 and none planned for 2008. There are no new funds available. Two rounds of payments have been made and hopefully the third and final round will be completed. Ground and Surface Water Program received approximately \$235,000 and 15 contracts were approved.

Shannon distributed handouts regarding draft data on EQIP and WHIP practices and the dollars obligated. He stated that there will be an EQIP Subcommittee meeting on September 6, 2007, from 9:00 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. at the NRCS State Office to discuss cost share levels and the practices cost shares. The subcommittee will bring the recommendations to the next State Technical Committee meeting.

FY08 Programs Compensation Levels Decision

Jim Dunaway stated that there is a plan to streamline and standardize the payment process by eliminating the cost share and pay a flat fee per practice. The purpose for this is that it is easier to administer the program. The planning and managing of the programs are easier. All parties know exactly what will be paid for each practice.

The committee recommended is to keep EQIP at 50% and WHIP at 75%. Since the WHIP program provides no monetary benefit for the landowner, they are doing it strictly for land conservation purposes only.

CRP Updates

Shannon Zezula filled in for Gail Peas. He stated that FSA was asked to update the Soil Rental Rates. Overall every Indiana rental rate increased approximately 30%. This applies to new enrollments.

It was stated that many livestock producers are falling short of feed for the winter. CRP allows for managing haying and grazing outside of the nesting period, August 2 through September 15 with a 25% soil rental rate reduction. There are Emergency Provisions allowed but authorization is needed. A landowner must prove that they are in a drought (based and approved on 40% less precipitation). This is also available for heavy rain and flooding. This provision has been approved for Jackson, Jennings and Lawrence Counties this year.

FSA is 10 years into Continuous CRP Renewals. There are approximately 2000 practices expiring at the end of September and once they expire they convert back to cropland. This means that the process begins again and those 2000 practices will be eligible for the higher soil rental rate.

Gary Langell, IDNR-Fish and Wildlife explained CP-38 – State acres for Wildlife Enhancement, 13,100 acres for endangered and threatened species. This continuous statewide signup will begin January 1, 2008, if proposal is approved. The proposal will need to be approved by the State Technical Committee.

Rapid Watershed Assessment Updates

Tammy Lawson, ISDA and Shannon gave a brief update on Rapid Watershed Assessments. Phase 1 is Resource Inventory. A contractor has been hired by ISDA to compile and analyze this data for all Indiana watersheds. This data will be posted on a website for the public to access. Phase 2 is the Assessment Matrix which takes the resource data and estimates the costs to address resource concerns. NRCS received an internal grant to complete Assessment Matrixes in six watersheds to determine a priority method for completing all of Indiana's watersheds.

Other Issues

Gary Langell, IDNR-Fish and Wildlife, stated that they have secured a Landowner Incentive Program Grant to convert fescue and brome to wildlife. This should begin August or September 2007.

Jennifer Boyle, IASWCD, stated they have a Watershed Specialist position through a 319 grant. She also stated that a decision will be made on Clean Water Indiana funding. There have been five regional meetings held to obtain input on how to allocate funding.

Larry Clemons, The Nature Conservancy, stated that they have started a WREP project in six counties along the Wabash is progressing better than planned. There are 1400 acres enrolled in that project, and they will be looking to expand further.

Tammy Lawson, ISDA, stated that the Indiana Land Resource Council is going to develop land use models for local land groups to use. This information will be available on ISDA's website.

Mike Beard, Indiana Pork Producers, stated that the national Pork Board has awarded one Hoosier the Environmental Steward Award.

Betsy Bower Smith- Indiana Certified Crop Advisor, stated that they are going to participate in a Ag Media Summit in Louisville at the end of the month.

Jeff Kiefer, US Fish and Wildlife, introduced Rich Geboy, who is the new Private Lands Biologist. He will be focusing on Endangered Species projects.

Ray McCormick, IASWCD, introduced himself as a new member of the committee.

The next scheduled Indiana State Technical Committee meeting is on **September 25, 2007**. It will be from 1:00-4:00 in the NRCS State Office Conference Room.

The next EQIP Subcommittee meeting is **September 6, 2007**.